

Luke 6.12-19
The Lord, the Twelve, and the Crowd

I remember when I first became a Christian. Aside from being overwhelmed with thankfulness over the fact that my sins were forgiven, what I really needed to know was, *“How does Jesus now expect me to live?”*

That’s really among the most basic of questions, isn’t it? After, *Who is God? Is, How does God want me to live?*

And that’s what we’re going to see Jesus telling his disciples starting here in Luke chapter 6. He’s been *declaring* that he’s the Christ, *proclaiming* forgiveness of sins, *telling* people to follow him. And these disciples have believed in him and were now following him.

And so, the question that remained to be answered is, *What exactly does it look like to follow him in your life? How ought we to live as his disciples?*

But before Jesus starts giving answers to those questions, we see in verses 12-19, the beginnings of this *new community* that’s starting to form around his person and teaching.

As he calls his disciples to himself on a mountain, and chooses from among them his 12 apostles, and then goes down with them to heal a multitude of people, and then teach them about what it looks like to be his disciple.

1. Jesus Chooses the Twelve (verses 12-16)

Now, we took a few weeks’ break from Luke’s Gospel. So let’s get caught up on where we are. Luke’s been presenting Jesus’ teaching and miracles since the middle of chapter 4.

And in the process, he’s been progressively revealing Jesus’ authority, beginning with his authority over demons and human sickness.

And then the controversy with the Pharisees and scribes began in earnest in the middle of chapters 5, when he demonstrated his authority to forgive sins with the account of the paralyzed man.

And at the beginning of chapter 6 that controversy progressed even more when Jesus declared himself to be Lord of the Sabbath—the one who has the authority to interpret the Sabbath commandment. And the one *around whom* the Sabbath is to be oriented.

And the end of that last section we looked at a few weeks ago in chapter 6 says, in verse 11, “*they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.*”

So, it’s in this context that we pick up this scene beginning at verse 12 of chapter 6. Jesus just declared himself to be Lord of the Sabbath to the religious authorities. And he knows they’re now trying to get him.

And in the face of the opposition, Luke tells us in verse 12, that Jesus went up to a mountain to pray, *and he continued in prayer to God all night long.*” *Why?* For 2 reasons.

1. Because he’s facing *intense opposition*. And he needed to get away from it so he could be empowered through communion with his Father in prayer.

2. He’s about to make a *vitaly important decision*. As he knows the time has come for him to establish leaders in his kingdom, who’ll proclaim his word and witness to his work after he’s gone.

So, after continuing an entire night in prayer, he chooses the 12 apostles. Now, think about this. The very Son of God spent an entire night in prayer as he made this decision to choose his 12 Apostles. And that shows us at least 2 things.

First, it demonstrates that the choice of the 12 apostles was by the will of God. As here we see that they were selected after an *entire night of prayer* from the Son of God to his Father.

And second, it reminds us *how essential* prayer really is. I mean, if the Lord Jesus spent a *whole night* in prayer to make important decisions, *how much* do we need to pray when we make decisions?

Last week in Acts 2, we saw that one of the characteristic features of the early church was that they *devoted themselves* to the prayers. And that had in view *specifically* corporate prayer.

But here we see our Lord in the discipline of private prayer. And both aspects of prayer are essential to the Christian life—coming together for set times of prayer with each other, but also praying privately.

Now, *don't misunderstand* me. When I say we need to pray when we make decisions, I'm not talking about praying and hoping to be zapped with some amazing revelation.

I fear a lot of times we have the mistaken impression that that's what prayer should be like. Especially when we're talking about things like "*discerning God's will.*"

But what I'm talking about is humbly approaching God in thanksgiving, confession, and petition. And asking for his guidance and blessing as you make decisions informed by his word. Because the will of God that we *need* to discern is the will he's laid out for us in his word.

And he calls us to faithfully devote ourselves to that revealed will, and to make decisions in light of it, in prayerful reliance upon him. And if we do that, we can trust that he'll have mercy on us and guide us as we live and make decisions in our lives.

And that takes a lot of the pressure off, *doesn't it?* You don't have to agonize over whether you're missing God's will for your life. Because if you're living in light of his word, and hoping and trusting in his mercy, then you can live in the freedom of knowing he's *for you* and *not against you*.

But all too often we're *too busy*, or *lazy*, or *just plain forgetful* to do even that, aren't we? But look at Jesus—spending *entire nights* in prayer. Now, we can deceive ourselves into thinking that, *O, Jesus was God, so we obviously could never be like that.*

But if we think that way, we have an unorthodox understanding of the incarnation. Yes, Jesus *is* God. But the point of the incarnation is that he really became human in *every way*, tempted in *every way* as we are, but without sin.

And the fact that he's God *doesn't cancel out* his true humanity. In reality, *he shows us* what a perfect human being is. *He shows us* how we're to live. And so, if we want to know how to live and how to pray, we need to look at him.

Now, take heart. If you happen to struggle to spend time in prayer, you're not alone. Martin Luther once wrote to his friend Philip Melanchthon about a time of prayerlessness in his life.

I sit here like a fool and hardened in leisure, pray little, do not sigh for the church of God, yet burn in a big fire of my untamed body. In short I should be ardent in spirit, but I am ardent in the flesh, in lust, in laziness, leisure, and sleepiness. Already eight days have passed in which I have written nothing, in which I have neither prayed nor studied.

Is that something you can relate to? We just get in these ruts, don't we? Times when we feel like we can't do anything but just float through life. And so, we acquiesce and become complacent.

But Luther understood that this *wasn't* a normal way for a Christian to live. That's not how it's supposed to be. He understood that his weakness was *no excuse*. Because we're all called to be constant and steadfast in prayer.

And if you feel like you can't pray, or you struggle to find the time to pray, or *just forget* to pray, then the first thing you need to do is pray to the Lord to help you pray!

And then read a psalm, or one of the great prayers of Scripture, to orient your mind. *Do everything you can* to make time and get focused to pray.

Do everything you can to rid yourself of all the influences that take you away from prayer. Because Prayer is one of the great disciplines of the Christian life. And we really can't live without it.

So, then we see in verses 13-16 that after Jesus spent a night in prayer, he chose his 12 apostles. But *who are they?* Well, notice first that the list of names begins with Simon Peter, and ends with Judas Iscariot.

So, every time the apostles are listed, the list is bracketed by these two figures. The first one, Simon, whom Jesus named Peter—the Rock, would often stumble, but not fall. Satan would attack him. But he wouldn't ultimately succeed. And Peter would become the great leader of the earliest church.

But, of course, the last name on the list, Judas, would fall entirely. He'll be overcome by Satan, betray Jesus, and eventually kill himself.

Now, the word "Apostle" simply means "one who is sent." In chapter 9, verses 1 and 2, Luke says Jesus *"called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal."*

Notice, these 12 "sent ones" were *sent out* to do the same sorts of things Jesus did himself—to have *power* and *authority* over demons and diseases, and to *proclaim* the kingdom of God and to *heal*. You see, there's an *intimate connection* between the master and his servants.

And it's no mere coincidence that there are 12 of them, and they're all Israelites. This of course establishes continuity with the 12 tribes of Israel.

And we see that continuity in the imagery of Revelation 21. As in John's vision of the New Jerusalem that came down out of heaven, the names of the 12 tribes of Israel are written on the *gates* of the city, and the names of the 12 apostles are on the *foundations* of its *walls*.

Now, keep in mind the context here in Luke 6. Jesus choosing the apostles is set against the immediate backdrop of the opposition to Jesus

by Israel's leaders. Jesus is *essentially* establishing the beginnings of a new leadership for God's people.

And these 12 men were all pretty ordinary judging by worldly standards, *weren't they?* I mean, Simon Peter was a fisherman, as were James and John.

Peter will be called Satan by Christ himself, and would later deny that he even knew Jesus. James and John will be rebuked because they wanted to call fire down from heaven on a Samaritan village.

Matthew was a tax collector. As we saw a few weeks ago, his job made him particularly despised in ancient *Jewish* society. Thomas doubted the resurrection of Christ. And all the Apostles had a lot of trouble understanding just what Jesus came to do.

None of them were of noble birth, or of especially great natural abilities, at least that we know of. They stumbled in their faith and understanding a number of times.

Yet *these* were the men Jesus chose to use to build his church. He didn't take them from among the religious and political elite. He chose *ordinary people*. Just as when David was chosen while tending the sheep. The Lord looks on the heart, not the outward appearance.

But remember, this is the same group of men we saw last week on the Day of Pentecost witnessing to Christ's resurrection after the Holy Spirit came upon them with power. They'll *perform miracles* and give their lives for their witness to Christ.

And their teaching is the foundation of the church. As Paul says in Ephesians 2.20, the church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets.

This is the sort of thing the Lord can do with ordinary people. Even people like you and me. No, none of us are apostles. But we *are* members of the body of Christ, and we're united with the risen Christ by faith.

If that's true of you, then you're an heir of the kingdom of heaven, and God has chosen you in order to *confound* the wisdom of the world.

You see, we tend to get caught up with things like celebrity and worldly status, *don't we?* We have this tendency to think the only people who can really get things done are people in the public spotlight.

"O, Tim Tebow, look at everything he's doing for the Lord." Or, "Imagine what it would be like if Lady Gaga got saved and was on fire for Christ."

We tend to forget that that's just not how the Lord usually works. He uses ordinary people. Fishermen, truck drivers, loving wives and mothers. Even the outcasts of society, like what we've been seeing in Luke—tax collectors and sinners.

2. Jesus Ministers to the Multitude (verses 17-19)

Well, after choosing the 12 apostles, Jesus goes down from the mountain with them. And they're met by a great multitude of people from all over the place.

Notice, Luke says here in verse 17, it was "*a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people.*" It's both people who're already devoted to following him, and people who're coming from around the region to see him.

So, even though Jesus has fallen into disfavor with many of the religious leaders, his popularity with the people hasn't diminished at all. They're still coming out to him to hear him and to be healed.

Now, Jesus is still in Galilee. But Luke specifies that the people came from all Judea and Jerusalem and Tyre and Sidon. That's basically just a way of saying they came from all over the place. As Jerusalem was to the South and Tyre and Sidon were to the North.

And the rest of chapter 6 contains Luke's version of some of the teachings we read in Matthew's Gospel in the *Sermon on the Mount*. But

Jesus isn't on a mountain here, is he? No. Luke specifically says in verse 17 that he's on a level place.

But Jesus says a lot of the same things here as in the *Sermon on the Mount*: The Beatitudes. The teaching on loving your enemies, and not judging others. And building your house on the Rock.

Now, some theories have been given to explain the differences between this and Matthew 5-7. But there's no reason to go any further than to just understand that Jesus taught similar things at multiple times and in multiple locations.

And *what's really interesting* about all this isn't necessarily *where* he did the teaching, but where it shows up in Luke's narrative.

Remember, Jesus just declared that he's the Lord of the Sabbath. The opposition of the Pharisees and Scribes is now clear. And he just chose his 12 apostles. And now as he teaches his disciples, he's going to give them commandments about how to live as citizens of the kingdom of God.

And so, we're seeing the line of demarcation between two kingdoms continuing to develop. *As in the face of opposition* Jesus has started to establish and train a new leadership for his kingdom.

And here, the first thing they do is go out and minister to the crowds of oppressed people that came to be healed. And that ministry takes two forms—healing and teaching. As Jesus heals the crowd, and then he teaches them. We've seen this throughout Luke's Gospel.

When he cast out the demon in the synagogue at Capernaum, he was *teaching*. When he produced the large catch of fish in Simon's boat, he *just got done teaching*.

When he healed the paralyzed man, he was *teaching*. When he healed the man with the withered hand, he was *teaching*.

And so, when Luke describes the reason these people came to Jesus, he makes the point to say that they came for *both* his teaching *and* his healing. Verse 18, they "*came to hear him and to be healed of their*

diseases.” You see, Jesus wasn’t just a wonder worker—like a great shaman or something like that. He was a *teacher* of the Kingdom of God.

And Luke’s been highlighting that ever since the first sermon Jesus gave at Nazareth, where he made it clear from Isaiah 61 that he came both to *proclaim* liberty to the captives, and at the same time to *actually set them free*.

So, Jesus is about to teach these people. But before he does that, he heals them and casts out demons. Luke says, *“And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.”*

Power came out of him and healed them all! Jesus has the Spirit *without measure*. He’s *overflowing* here with power to heal. And he’s continuing to put into action the freedom from oppression that’s characteristic of the kingdom of God.

And it’s no coincidence that this mention of power follows a night Jesus spent in prayer. We saw the same thing back in 5.16-17, where Luke told us Jesus withdrew to desolate places to pray, and then in the *very next verse* says that *“the power of the Lord was with him to heal.”*

Now, of course, false prophets in the past performed wonders and led God’s people astray. Balaam, for instance, prophesied, and then led the people into idolatry. But the case was entirely different with Jesus of Nazareth.

Because he upheld God’s law. He pointed the people of Israel to their God. And what’s more, he healed their infirmities, released them from oppression, and forgave their sins, just as the Lord God of Israel promised to do.

And so, after he heals these people, he’s going to go on and give his new community some of the principles by which their lives are to be lived. And what Jesus gives here *isn’t just* a list of scattered ethical teachings. But it’s principles for living in the kingdom of God.

And the *fundamental concern* throughout is, *What are you living for? Where is your treasure? Is it in the kingdom and values of this world—this present age. Or is it in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, which will only be fully realized in the age to come?*

Now, we'll start getting into the specific teachings next week. But I say that here to just sort of orient our thinking to what's coming up.

Because if you look through the rest of the chapter, you'll see that Jesus is concerned to tell his disciples the reward they'll receive in the age to come if they place their treasure there and not in the transient things of this present age.

Look through what he says. *If you're poor, you'll be rich. If you're hungry, you'll be filled. If you weep, you'll laugh. If you're reviled and despised for Christ, you have a great reward.*

If you love your enemies, your reward will be great. If you don't condemn, you won't be condemned. If you forgive others, you'll be forgiven. If you give to others, more will be given back to you. It's all about letting go of the things that are esteemed in this present age in order to gain everlasting reward in the age to come.

So, where is your hope? Where is your treasure? What are you living for? And how does the reality that the kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ impact how you live your life?

Those are some of the questions we'll be considering over the next couple weeks.